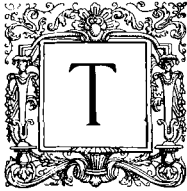


# The Dream Drummer

BY ARTHUR JOHNSON



HE older man pulled the one arm-chair which the smoking compartment afforded nearer the light. Small and hot and airless as the place was, it was better than his berth in the midst of the darkened, snoring car. His body swayed when the train swerved; the book joggled in his hand; but he continued to read interestedly.

"Is that 'Butterfly' or 'Bohème'?" he thought, listening to a low musical whistling behind him. His eyes rested on the top margin of a page: "'Bohème'—quartette—third act," he concluded—and went on reading. Again he paused: it was the entrance song of 'Butterfly,' now—there was no mistaking it—beautifully toned, too. How *could* anybody whistle like that? . . . Three pages hence he was listening to something of Mozart's; he tried to remember what it was. Then he read again until a quick, syncopated dance tune caught him. His book moved to the rhythm of it. He turned round.

The younger man was sitting in the middle of the three stationary plush seats along the side. A leather bag was open near him. He was putting papers in little piles up and down the empty cushions. He didn't look up.

"A fellow that could dance to it, I bet!" the older man reflected. "Tall, slender, quick on his feet. Anybody could see that. A handsome, fine-looking chap. What in hell should he be doing with those papers?"

The porter stuck his head in at the door. "Berth's ready, sir," he said to the older man.

"Bring me a cigar, porter," was the reply.

"No cigar now, sir. Dining-car's off. Sorry, sir." And he withdrew his head.

"Have one of these, will you?" spoke the younger man, rummaging in his bag.

"They're only Mildred Sixes I got at the station."

"Don't like to decrease *your* supply," said the older man.

"But I've got all these!" said the other, waving his paper-boxful. "Looks like I should surely have more'n enough to get me to Baltimore."

He passed the box over. The older man took one, lighted it, and gave a light to the younger man.

"I hate sleeping-cars," he said.

"I'm used to every kind of traveling," said the younger man. "I've knocked all round on them so much. Seems like I could sleep better to this noise and motion and these coal fumes than I could at home. I reckon I've got demoralized."

"That's the trouble with me," put in the older man; "I don't travel enough."

"I've been all over the United States," said the younger man: "Middle West, Pacific slope—all around. I've had the *Wanderlust*."

He asked questions about the older man's experiences; then he proceeded to talk of his own.

"Most Easterners," he announced, "don't know anything about the beauty of this country—the great American desert, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington, Seattle. Why, there are wonderful regions in between Seattle and Los Angeles."

The older man listened dreamily. He was amused. The younger man was perfectly spontaneous, he was chock-full of feelings, and he wasn't at all afraid to express them. He had charm, too. He sat still there a moment, his cigar between his teeth, his eyes lowered. Then he blew out a long draught of smoke and said:

"Ever been to New Orleans?"

"Never."

"That's a place I love! There are marvelous French restaurants. And the creoles are so attractive-looking. Most

people think, you know, that a creole has negro blood, but that's not true. . . . There's awfully good opera there—with real French artists. The place is romantic, which sounds like a strange thing to say. It's the only way I can describe it to you."

He must have been twenty-odd, the older man calculated. His voice was Southern; his hands wiry and muscular—as if he had played baseball.

But it was extraordinary the way he had abandoned himself to this talk. His open bag beside him was neglected; he had lost all consciousness of the little piles of paper he had so carefully arranged. He was lolling back, his head bent forward, gazing, recollecting, dreaming.

"Of all the things I have seen," he said, "the desert is the most beautiful—most inspiring."

"The *desert*?" echoed the older man without understanding.

"In New Mexico—Arizona and Nevada, you know. Sometimes it's so clear you can 'most see across it. And at moments it overwhelms you with terror. It changes. It has moods. . . . Death Valley is wonderful. People have lost their way crossing it. Why, once a man was twelve days in it alone. Nobody could make him tell—when they found him—what had happened, what he had seen. But he was—well, insane. He's in an asylum there, now—somewhere in the Southwest. He'll never be any better.

"There aren't any sand-storms like the Eastern deserts have, but it's very much like them, people say. I should like to see the Eastern deserts! . . . There are cacti growing in it, so the tracks don't get covered up, but they are all alike and few people know where they lead. . . . It makes me think harder than any place I've ever seen. . . . If I could write anything at all, I'd like to write—I don't know as you'll understand me—I'd like to write a philosophical description of the desert."

The older man was silent.

"I've just finished reading," said the younger man, "a very great book. It's Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive Battles*. Have you heard of it?"

The older man had.

"Well, I think they are all wonderful

battles," the younger man said, "but I do like Waterloo best! There's that about Napoleon always made him appear to me like about the greatest man ever lived. I reckon you've read Victor Hugo's powerful book, *Les Misérables*. The description in there is fine—about the best description I know. But I enjoyed still more what Creasy said about it. Do you remember?" And he launched forth upon numerous impressions the account had made on him.

He had a graphic way of putting things; it was sketchy, but the older man understood him perfectly and got a vivid sense of what feelings lay behind. There was something rather distinguished, too, in the younger man's speech—interspersed though it was with Southern ungrammatical idioms and infrequent "ain'ts." He had blue eyes, and such a nice smile. He showed a fine, frank pride in himself.

"I often think," he said, "that a man who ain't been to college, like me, can get a pretty good education by reading. Now, at New Haven, where I stay, I go round occasionally to see some of the fellers in their rooms; but I never found one of 'em reading a book. Sometimes I think I have more advantages than they do. And traveling's education, of course. And business, I reckon.

"What is your business?" asked the older man.

At that the younger man relighted his cigar, then faced the older man squarely; unconsciously he brought himself up a little more erect and spoke in a different rhythm. "I sell stenophones—it's a dictating machine, you know—in the state of Connecticut. That ain't my home, but it's my territory."

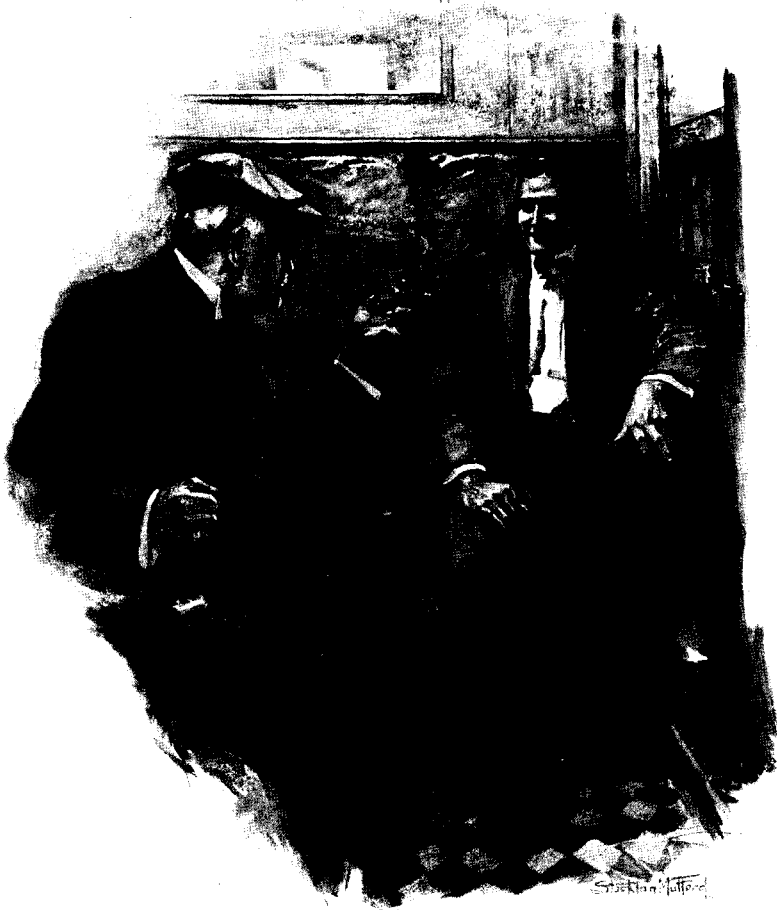
"I don't see how anybody can ever sell anything!" exclaimed the older man.

"Well, I did used to think it was pretty cheeky, but—"

"Oh, I should *like* to sell things," the older man said as if to correct an impression. "I should enjoy it, I mean—but it must be so difficult."

"I like it as well, I reckon," said the younger man, "as I'd like any business. And—it surprises me awfully, really it does—I don't believe it's true, but they say I'm good at it."

There was a pause. When he spoke



"I'VE A DAUGHTER I WANT YOU TO SEE. I WISH TO HEAVEN YOU'D MARRY HER!"

again he had relapsed into his freer, more natural manner.

"I hate to be bound down to a business. Now you may think it ain't a practical way of talking, but in order to succeed at a business you've got to have it on your mind all the time. You can't afford to forget it at lunch—or while you sleep, even. You must focus day and night. It takes so much of your time—that's the only trouble with it. Anything's interesting to do, of course, if you do it well. But I love adventure! I want to see things! I want to know everything! I don't want to be bound down. That's why I like what I'm in—I'm out and all over the lot in no time. It's funny I should be telling this all to *you*!"

There was that in the emphasis on the last word which made the older man cringe. Was it possible he looked so old and so stern—so settled that no sympathy could be apparent in him for the wild love of freedom the younger man was declaiming? *Why* was it strange he should be told things—he who— Ah, if the younger man only knew!

"I've never seen a thoroughly successful business or professional man," went on the younger man, "who I thought came anywhere near getting the full wide sweep of living. They're not fit to get it. Their systems are too grooved with what they've got to do to keep going. They don't half see, they don't half smell! And it's presumptuous

of me to say it, you'll think, but I don't believe they half *know*. There!"

The older man was shivering a little.

"Now when I go out to sell I don't take a list of places with me. I don't have any business directory. I don't search the papers for names. I just strike out over the country, get off at a likely-looking station, and walk a mile. If I see some chimneys yonder, I says, 'I'll try that there place.' I go into the office—I always tell them beforehand just what I want—I don't make any bluffs."

"What *do* you do?" asked the older man, attentively. "I should like to know."

"First day I ever went to sell a stenophone I remember walking up and down past the door five or six times. I crossed over the street so as to have a view from the opposite side. I was frightened. Now I don't care at all. I walk right in and ask to see the president, or the manager, you know—or the biggest person in charge. I always go straight to the top.

"I look at the lay of the land," he continued. "I make up my mind. If I see there's much hope I offer a month's trial—on condition they use it regular, mind you, and don't ring the women in. Oh, you can tell what to do when you get your eyes on the situation! . . . Sometimes I just talk a little while and go out—make an impression on them. I find my Western trips help me a great deal—telling about it, I mean." He laughed intelligently.

"It's mighty interesting. This afternoon, for instance, how I lost my temper! It was at— But I won't say the name. There was one of those trusted old women clerks in charge of the department. Of course they all hate—the stenographers do—to see me coming. They don't care about efficiency, and they know I'm their enemy. . . . She said stenophones wouldn't be tried in that office. She was mentioning it to one of the girls—bragging how she could manage Mr. Hilton (he's the president, you know), and how she'd see to my finish, all right. . . . I've worked at shorthand some—it comes handy—and I took down everything she said. Then I went in and read it off to the president. 'Who

runs this establishment?' I says. 'Do *you*—or does your secretary?' . . . Funny! I'm going to make an installation there next Monday. . . . Interesting types you meet. I love people. I want to see people all the time. And places. And things.

"Of course I used to do a lot more talking than I do now that I'm more experienced—now I know what a first-rate article I've got. Now I just go in and say: 'Why, it's like the suffrage question—no argument against it. It'll save you ten per cent. of your time and fifteen per cent. of the employment you hire. . . . Then'—he raised and let fall his hands for emphasis—"then I let *them* do the buying."

"How did you happen to hit on this business?" asked the older man.

"After I failed my examinations going to college, I tried to work in a broker's office for a while, but I couldn't stand it. I lit out and went West. When I came back I had this opportunity. The variety of it appealed to me, and I made up my mind to succeed, for I knew it was the last chance I'd have to begin getting any reputation for myself."

He was looking out of the window—absent-minded, dreaming.

"I have an uncle in New York who's a rich man. He has all kinds of people come to his house—clergymen, authors, theatrical people. I often go there to dine. I never speak; just sit and listen to what they all say—I love it so."

"Get to New York often?" asked the older man.

"Every week 'most. I'm going to Baltimore now—but this is an exception; it's my sister's birthday, and she's living there. . . . I never have any sort of social life at New Haven. I just stay home evenings and read—or else go down to the store to play the records over in the phonograph department. I spend lots of evenings alone there, just listening to those Melbas and Carusos and Geraldine Farrars. . . . I have only a couple of rooms and a bath. . . . I really miss home. There are lots of things about a home I like—I always get hungry about this hour and want to go to the ice-box and find something to eat." He smiled engagingly.

The train swept round a curve. The

younger man looked out through the dark, blank window. He was silent a long time. Suddenly he remembered the older man's presence and glanced round at him.

"Light road-bed," he said—"too light for this train. It goes all up North, you know, to cross the Poughkeepsie Bridge. Rails weren't laid for such heavy traffic. Uncomfortable."

He stared out the window again until a sneeze of the older man's brought him round. He began to gather up his little piles of papers—whistling the "Lohengrin" march. The older man watched him keenly. Bolts had been shot back in him somewhere, letting loose a whole flood of memories and enthusiasms; forgotten hopes blossomed into warm life.

"It's too bad I've kept you up telling you all this rot," apologized the younger man.

"Not at all," said the older man. And then he said: "See here. Come to New York and spend a Sunday with me some time, will you? I've a daughter I want you to see. . . . I wish to heaven you'd marry her!"

The younger man laughed right out; then he sat up and looked admiringly at the older man.

"I will, you know," was his answer. "I mean—I will *come!* Why do you wish I'd marry your daughter?"

"So as to liven her up," said the older man. "She's all right—too much poor conventional nonsense, that's all. No flavor—no real joy of living—no chance for it. . . . I don't know why I have her so on my mind. I guess it's *you* have set me wondering. Sometimes I don't think I've given her half a show at life. . . . It's not an interesting outlook for you, is it?"

"Well, you can't tell. Perhaps it's that should be tempting me to go see for myself."

"She's twenty," said her father with a sigh.

"I'm twenty-six," said the younger man.

They stood up. The older man presented his card and watched the younger man write his name on a stenophone catalogue and pass it over. The fellow had somehow tempted him to ad-

venture; it was as if he had mockingly said to him, "Now see here—you wouldn't, for example, ever do a thing like that, would you?" And for answer the older man had wanted to give some guarantee of his understanding. Yes, something of the sort might be the explanation for his having invited the younger man to visit him.

Ethel James was very much surprised the afternoon preceding Buchanan's arrival, when her father so animatedly announced that a business friend of his was coming to whom he hoped she would be nice. Never did she remember any business friend visiting them for a Sunday! But there were unbridged gaps between herself and her father that she was conscious of being unable to probe—gaps expressed by the sudden wondering scrutiny he often turned on her; or by his apparent exasperation on account of something she said or did. So she asked no questions.

When she saw Buchanan cross the room toward her she instantly regretted not having taken more pains with her clothes. It fairly shocked her to have him exclaim:

"I'm delighted at last to see you—a pleasure I've looked forward to a long time."

Aware of the up-and-down glance he so self-composedly began to give her, she caught, too, her father's enigmatic expression. "Oh yes, father has told me so much about you!" she found herself inventing, at which he took a step nearer.

"Really, you do look lots like him. You're not a bit what I thought you would be."

"Sorry," she murmured, dazedly, with a queer sense of his strangeness.

"His dark hair and gray-green eyes," he continued—"and his merry, twinkling mouth, I vow! . . . You know—really—I hope we shall be great friends."

"Why?" she asked, timidly.

"Because you look like I wanted you for a friend," was the answer.

She gazed down at the floor—then something gave her the unwonted courage to look straight up at him without saying anything. He appeared to her just then a little as though he'd come

off the stage of some Broadway theater. Certainly she had never seen anybody in the least like him; experience had led her to think she never would. His clothes were all right, but they, too, were somehow different. His manners were decidedly different as he stood there staring at her, his mouth more or less open, half smiling. . . . She was glad when dinner was announced.

They did most of the talking.

"Who is that?" asked Mr. Buchanan, pointing to her mother's portrait. "Appears like she had lots of get-up-and-go to her."

"Really? My wife died when Ethel was scarce five," her father explained, apparently undisturbed by either the question or the remark that had followed it. "Ethel is like her—don't you think?"

"Not altogether," said Mr. Buchanan, directing his eyes to Ethel. "Girls generally do take after their fathers—don't they? And—it's a queer fact—parents don't ever know anything at all about their own children. Mine never did about me. If I ever have any children I sha'n't reckon I'll have an idea of what they're like. Shall you?" he asked, looking at Ethel.

She felt she might have coped with the awkwardness well enough if only her father wouldn't keep grinning so superciliously—as if he thought she was making a fool of herself.

"Howard" (it was the way he addressed Mr. Buchanan), "it's too bad we haven't a phonograph to play some of your Melbas and Carusos on. You must whistle to us after dinner.

"Whistle!" She laughed outright. It was almost the first word she had spoken.

"Often I whistle myself to sleep," Mr. Buchanan said to her. "I lie in that little narrow room of mine—I can't most see the wall-paper now, I hate it so—and I whistle. Sometimes I sing, too." And he faced her compellingly to execute a phrase from the second act of "Tristan."

"I thought men never liked German music," she said, almost solemnly.

"Really? . . . And I like this, too. Don't you?" He further demonstrated.

"Are you a musician?" she asked.

"No; I'm sorry to say, I'm not."

"What are you?"

"Well—if you mean how do I make money—I sell stenophones."

"Stenophones? I never heard of them. Something like a dictograph?"

She was so annoyed by her father's chuckle that she couldn't give full attention to what Mr. Buchanan was saying, but she soon forgot her difficulty. No man had ever talked so seriously to her before. If some of her questions were rather foolish—just the kind that never led anywhere at parties—Mr. Buchanan none the less treated them as being really worth listening to.

"I have kind of a connection, you see, with talking-machine companies, and I could telephone and get a phonograph up here in no time. Do you like to dance? . . . Now let's think what records we want. Oh, I love the 'Blue Danube,' but it's no good for the Hesitation. We want 'Autumn,' and the 'Nights of Gallants,' and 'On the Heather,' and 'Irresistible.' Wonder do you know this step?" And he caught her up from the table and guided her round with, "Why, it's like the dawn! It's like moonlight on the water! Oh, it's the whole thing—dancing with you, really!"

She thought her father looked rather glum while they all sat in the library after dinner; he seemed constrained—he didn't join much in the conversation. It was as if (the idea took definite shape in her mind) he might be envious of the attention Mr. Buchanan was giving her; as if he hadn't counted on their getting on so well. But she was worried when her father left them alone.

"I don't want to keep you from any business you may have to attend to," she said.

"Business? That's the beauty of mine—I don't have to think of it all the time, same's most people do. I run round and do it, all right; then I forget it for good. But I'm 'fraid I've bored you with too much about my business. I've been enjoying it so much myself, you see. I like to talk to you. Most girls I don't. There's that about them—can't say what it is—saps my vitality. Makes my face feel queer—like I had paralysis in it or something. Unnatural feeling,



*Drawn by Stockton Mulford*

HE CAUGHT HER UP FROM THE TABLE, AND GUIDED HER AROUND

you know. You're always trying to get the better of it and you just can't. When you throw your soul into a subject they look back at you like you'd said, 'Maybe it'll rain to-morrow,' or, 'Are you fond of reading?' or, 'I think so, too.'"

His point was clear, but she wanted to say nothing in reply; all the "of courses" and "yes, indeeds" and the "very, very muches" she had ready for such occasions died on her lips. Once she found herself thinking that he was not, after all, a very cultivated man, but she banished the thought.

When the phonograph came she sat listening in awe to the directions he gave the two men about setting it up; she noted his forceful gestures, his quick steps here and there; admired his "Now, thank you, fellers. Here's a quarter for each of you," when the job was finished.

She began to dread the time of dancing with him lest she should utterly disappoint him; but she soon found herself lost in his enthusiasm, not upset even when he rebuked her by saying:

"No, that ain't it, really. Let me show you. . . . And you ought to put a gliding, mysterious motion into it—like rolling or flying. Pretend you're a river."

Suddenly he stopped in the middle of a tune, and, keeping his position meanwhile, brought out: "Let's go find some good place to dance."

"Oh!" she gasped. And then, "I should like to, but I'm afraid I can't."

"That's the difficulty—hang it!—with girls. You no more than get your spirits up and there you are—with a lot of fool nonsense spoiling everything. It's a deuced shame!"

"All right, I'll go," she said with a studied attempt at boldness. "But father won't approve."

"I'll fix him, fast enough," Mr. Buchanan said. And he took a note-book from his pocket and wrote on a page of it, which he then tore out and handed to her. It read:

I have persuaded Miss James to go out somewhere where there is real music. We also want some air, and it is a lovely evening. Maybe we shall go to Mascatti's.

H. BUCHANAN.

"Where shall we put it?" he exclaimed, taking it back from her and darting round the room. "Now hurry—get your coat and we'll pick up a taxi some place. Got a pin? . . . This will do all right, I guess," he concluded, affixing the paper to the frame of a mid-Victorian sunset that hung in the hall.

She would never forget that evening. From one dancing restaurant to another they went—places she had never seen or heard of. Each time he arranged things so easily, so competently, for her—always found just the right table, acted in a way to make her feel perfectly at home and as if everything was just as it should be. Her father couldn't mind very much, she thought, with recurring flutters of fear. . . . And he was so companionable—she couldn't remember that any ball she had ever been to was like this. She would catch sight of their figures in a mirror and wonder, "Was that rather pretty girl with the light hair and the flushed face and the wide-open eyes dancing with the tall, elated man—was that really herself?" . . . until she laughed merrily at his saying, "Let's fade three times, with a double dip at the end."

When she got home she saw that the note was gone from the picture. Mr. Buchanan said he couldn't possibly sleep so soon after dancing. She couldn't, either, but she said good night and went to bed.

His visits to the James household became frequent after that.

Outside of the usual throng she had come in contact with, she had had no visions of what young men were like. It had never occurred to her that there was anybody in the world like Howard Buchanan. Her dreams—however romantic—had always been perfectly conventional ones; she had no imagined standards. Consequently she was often puzzled thinking how she could classify him—particularly when her friends seemed to find him so attractive.

"But I think it's rather queer nobody notices his not having been to college," she told her father, "nor the unusual words he uses sometimes—his manners and everything."

"Nonsense! People aren't so small-minded as you think they are," he said,



with one of his frowns. "They haven't all your petty idea that everybody's got to be cast in the same tiresome mold—even if they happen to have been, themselves. Buchanan's a wonder. He's the real thing. Foolish nothings be damned! He ought to delight any one. And a gentleman, I tell you, to his finger-tips!"

It was a great relief to her to hear that. Nevertheless she was surprised that her father allowed her so many liberties all of a sudden; perhaps she had never understood—perhaps it was her own fault that she had always had to be so particular. But her father did seem to trust Mr. Buchanan extraordinarily.

She and her father had begun to have a good deal more in common than they used to. Often they would spend long evenings together by the fire, talking about all manner of subjects.

"How did you happen to know Howard?" she asked him, some months later.

"Oh—through a matter of some investments," he gravely assured her. And she tried to go on with her book.

"What're you reading, daughter?" he asked.

"It's Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive Battles*, father. Ever—?" But her father seemed seized with uncontrollable laughter.

"I was thinking," he apologetically explained, "how funny it was you should have got a new copy of it. The book's been in the house for years."

"Really!" she exclaimed with great interest. "Have you ever read *Les Misérables*? . . . We never have discussed books very much together, have we?"

Now why should he jump up so unexpectedly, at that point, and go out of the room without answering her question?

In due course there was also added to her library a copy of *Lucile*—a *de luxe* edition, gorgeous in green morocco; and somewhat later there came by mail one morning *The Three Musketeers*, on the fly-leaf of which was written, "From d'Artagnan."

It was her letter of thanks for this last which received no answer. For three days she waited impatiently, full of hopes and surmises. Then followed a week of misery; then another and another.

Of course, she reasoned, he might be sick—he might be in need of her. But she was more worried than convinced. Hesitantly—surrounding herself with all kinds of idle theories—she wrote again. In vain; she got no reply. The letters which it had been his habit to send her in the middle of each week—he often had sent her two in weeks when he wasn't coming to New York—had stopped altogether.

"Where in the world is Howard?" her father kept demanding.

"Don't know, father. How should I know?" She was conscious of his astonishment at the words she found to answer him.

"Hear anything?" he insisted. "Why not write and ask him down?"

"Of course I can, father," was her ready assent—without further committing herself.

He shot her an admiring look. "By goodness! daughter," he said, "don't know what I should do these days without you!" A tribute that, coming as it did in the midst of her anxiety, greatly pleased her.

She herself realized how changed she was.

Howard Buchanan listened to the last of Louise's great aria—*Un souvenir charmant des premiers jours d'amour*; he did not know what the words meant, but they made their appeal. He waited until the needle scratched on the blank edge, then sadly removed the record and began to roll a cigarette. To-night had not been one of his successes at entertaining himself. He strolled about the deserted show-room, opening and shutting one instrument after another, testing the winding-gear, examining the finish of a case. The place seemed ghostly to him. In disgust he found himself whistling the last bar of the aria.

"Hang it!" he exclaimed. "I believe I'm sick of this business. I'd like to strike out overland."

He flung his coat on his arm—for the evening was hot—and made ready to go home. The streets were gloomier than he had ever seen them; his walk was pointless and empty.

On the hall floor, inside his little apartment, there lay a letter; but he stepped

resolutely across it and turned on the light. After that he hung up his coat with more than usual pains, pattered awhile with some papers on his desk, until—when the task could not be delayed any longer—he walked back to where the letter lay. For a brief moment he paused there, regarding it, and then, with quivering hands, picked it up and tore it—as he had torn so many others before it—into small pieces, which he threw into the fire. There seemed nothing to do but go to bed.

Something he had said to a customer during the day crossed his mind: "If there's one habit I pride myself on, it's not letting things I want to forget worry me. Good heavens! man, there's enough in the world to keep you from dwelling on facts you don't want to think of. I sha'n't have them bothering me." It drove him straight to his little library in the corner, where, running his forefinger over two shelves of books, he took out Carlyle's *French Revolution* and began turning the pages in search of something to hold his attention. When he found that one passage fitted his mood as badly as another, he stopped arbitrarily at the ninth chapter—putting the book face downward on his bed. He lighted the lamp beside it.

In the midst of undressing he took a pack of cards from the table for a round of Canfield. Again and again he tried to make it come out right, his brain automatically prompting him to plays the

while he muttered involuntarily to himself, as he put down an ace or shifted a queen to another pile: "Greenwich—New London—Stamford, perhaps. No; never again. We'll fool 'em; we'll break away from 'em, eh? Rotten of me? Of course it is. You've got to pre-

serve your identity somehow. Poor fellow! Ethel, I say, Ethel. . . . It's coming out this time! . . . Probably. Well, you can't tell. . . . In the desert, perhaps—after she's married," until his brain was seething with layers of thoughts beyond his control. Abruptly he ceased playing and went to bed.

Carlyle's *French Revolution* read like it was remarkably heavy, he thought; it brought no pictures to his mind, awoke no mysterious imaginings, though he had so often cited it as the best example of his favorite kind of writing—philosophical description, he called it. Now he had to

keep going back half a page to get the thread, and when he got it he would discover in despair how he had finished with the same difficulty an hour ago.

He dared not put out the light. The wall-paper rolled and rolled, in long horizontal series of convoluted spaces, which he followed and followed to where the door-jamb made a break; then, from beginning to end, once more he was lost in them.

With a sharp cry of pain he got up and went out into his study. He stirred the fire and put on another log. Several



FOR A BRIEF MOMENT HE PAUSED THERE, REGARDING IT

stenophone circulars had to be sacrificed before he could get a blaze.

"What to-morrow?" he murmured. "I must find a new place; but where? Something to start me going!" And he unfolded the geological survey maps on his desk.

At last Farmington caught his eye; it had a good many concentric lines around it denoting hills, and a river, and a square red spot that meant some sort of industry. He grew more and more satisfied as he noted the size of it. It would be lovely, perhaps, and oozy and fragrant, just as he wanted it!

To have some definite aim—however fanciful—gave him courage for another attempted sleep. "Wonder why I'm so peaceful and quieted?" he thought to himself as he put out all the lights and got into bed. "I knew I could conquer it if I just persisted. Funny what was the matter with me!"

But he slept fitfully and awoke early. He put on a thin pepper-and-salt suit, with a broad, luridly striped necktie that he had often tried when he felt the need of stimulus; and, blithe as a lark, started for the station.

It was a lovely, caressing day of spring. The hurrying mass of people whom he passed seemed to have some inspiration to guide them. Squalid lines of houses took on a mellow look, seeming almost to blend with the yellowing shrubs in front of them. "It's odd," Buchanan said to himself, "that sometimes I can find New Haven so beautiful. Just now, for instance—well, of course nobody would understand me—but it's really all thrilling." Here and there he met somebody to whom he had either sold stenophones or else tried to sell them, which gave him the familiarity of being at home.

At Hartford he alighted and took a "tram"—it always amused him to call them that—marked "Farmington." When it happened to stop for somebody near an attractive-looking crossways, he decided to get out and walk.

The spot was like a toy village—so perfect, so neat. Something of Virginia (dear Virginia) in the style of everything. House-fronts waited patiently along the way, as if arranged there on purpose for him to walk by, under the just-budding elm-trees. Dogs were run-

ning wild to-day. There was a hum everywhere. "How good it is," he thought, "to aerate the lower lung in this delicious ozone!"

The road dipped down a hill. There in the hollow, sure enough, towered the grim brick walls of a factory. Really, it looked promising. "Wicked, I suppose," he thought, gazing at wooded heights beyond the town; "but I must try it on."

After he had given a plain visiting-card to somebody at the door he asked for it back, determined, in a fit of boldness, to write, "Who calls to sell you stenophones," below his name. The memory of what he had once said to the older man in that smoking-compartment of the sleeper—"I always tell them beforehand exactly why I'm there"—had suddenly prompted him to live up to the extravagant statement. "I'm not fit to be at large," he thought. But the man, who at last so forbiddingly appeared, stepped back at sight of him.

"Are you the president?" Buchanan asked with a smile.

"No, I'm not; I'm the treasurer."

"That's all right, then," Buchanan assured him.

"Well, maybe you'd better come inside, anyhow," said the treasurer, "though I just stepped out to say we didn't want any of your stenophones."

"Oh," exclaimed Buchanan, following him in. "Do you know—I am mad with spring! I'm all ablaze with it! I'm crazy with sheer love of the world. How are you? What's your name?"

"Come on in," said the treasurer.

"You don't often get this, do you?" asked Buchanan. "Why, down in New Haven—as far as all this whiff in the air goes—you might as well be in darkest Africa."

"Somehow I always thought I'd like to be in darkest Africa," responded the treasurer, pointing out a chair.

"I'd like to see the deserts there," remarked Buchanan, with sudden moodiness. "I guess nothing but the endless wastes of a desert would suit me now!"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Don't know. Wish I did," Buchanan forced himself to say.

"Thought you wanted to sell something," said the treasurer.

"Oh yes!" Buchanan exclaimed, as if suddenly remembering. "See here. I've got a first-class proposition—one you can't afford to let go by. Why, it's like clockwork for the time it saves you. You—"

But the treasurer held his hand desperately up for refusal. "Nothing doing," he said.

"Thought so," answered Buchanan, delphically. "Say, tell me—have you ever felt this way?"

"How?" asked the treasurer, with a slow, steady grin, slapping his hand down onto his knee.

"As if you didn't know where you were? Sort of transplanted—as a cactus, so to speak, would feel in a swamp? Oh, I don't know! I love everything in the world. But it appears to me, sometimes, like I just couldn't go on living."

"I guess you've got spring fever," said the treasurer, laughing.

"Well, I have. But this other—it goes with it—do you know?"

"See here," said the treasurer, "are you married?"

"No. Don't want to be."

"Now why don't you?" asked the treasurer in a fervent tone.

"Not in my line," was the answer. "Too occupying. Too engrossing. You can't light out and travel when you want to. Can't get it off your mind—ever. It's like a business—takes too much time."

"So I thought once," recollected the treasurer. "But it's like a piece of blotting-paper for all that nonsense you've been handing out to me."

"Hear, hear!" Buchanan cried with surprise. "You talk like you was somebody, after all." And he gave the treasurer a good looking over.

"I'm a married man, if that's what you mean, young feller."

"I feel this way about it," explained Buchanan, the *tempo* of his speech slightly different. "I've always thought best to put it off as long as I could—so as to have plenty of room for the things I like, you know. Then—if ever exactly the right girl turned up—I reckoned I ought to consider doing it. Now it's like this"—he spoke as if referring to a thousand years back—"once she did, I thought, turn up. But I hadn't courage

for the experiment. I couldn't bring myself to see what there was to be gained by it. All my youthful longings and aspirations seemed like they would be engulfed by the steadiness of it. . . . And I love children, too. I think it's only right to produce some, you know. . . . But in a hundred years from now I reckon that would all be the same. You can't afford to stultify yourself just to be a link, can you? Besides—there's the loving, and the end of loving, to count on. I've never liked any one thing more'n a year at a time. How do you reckon I'd stick to a wife—with all her demands and dresses absorbing me? First time she began growing old I might feel like I hated her, too."

"No, you wouldn't," vouched the treasurer. "The human body and heart ain't made that way."

"I know they ain't," said Buchanan. "But that's really the worst horror of all. It's like getting into one of those stuffy, airless trolley-cars. After you've been in it awhile you don't know the difference between it and the summit of Olympus. I—I want to be aware of everything all the time. I don't want to grow sated and settled and old. I don't want to get to be without any sense, and prosaic."

"You'll find the right girl yet," promised the treasurer.

"That's the trouble," said Buchanan; and again he spoke as of things long ago. "I couldn't ever find anything the matter with her. . . . I'd always seen this or that little fault in all the others—things that made me shudder some, you know. But this one was perfectly all right. She was for ever surprising me that I did not grow sick of her, or want to change some one detail that got on my nerves."

"Too bad," sympathized the treasurer. "I don't for the life of me see why she didn't take to you. I'd have done it, I think."

At that Buchanan eyed him greedily.

"Lost all hope?" asked the treasurer.

"Oh, I'm miserable," said Buchanan. "I'm fit to die!"

"Don't forget your duty as a citizen," the treasurer remonstrated. "There's always your work to console you. It's up to you to do it nobly."

"Circumstances are against me just now, apparently," remarked Buchanan, shaking his head.

"Down on your luck, are you?" asked the treasurer, kindly.

"Well—a little, right *here*, I reckon," said Buchanan, smiling.

"I should like to help you," pondered the treasurer.

"You *can*, then," stated Buchanan, pleasantly, switching him nearer. "Let me make an installation—on trial," he suddenly pleaded, an eager light in his eyes.

"No. They say it's too hard dictating into them," objected the treasurer. "You have to mention all your capital letters, and take too much pains with your past tenses. If you don't you can't make out the difference between 'shaved' and 'shave' on the cylinders, for instance. You've always got to remember to say *shavèd*. See?"

"I got rid of that objection up in Bridgeport once," answered Buchanan. "A fellow made it, you know—"

"What did you say to him?" asked the treasurer.

"Oh, I got him another job," was Buchanan's quick reply.

"I'll be damned!" cried the treasurer. "*That* the way you do business?"

"Don't know what line to take with you," said Buchanan.

"Well, well, now. How much would it cheer you or help you if I gave you a chance?" The treasurer seemed mounting to dizzy heights of kindness. "Do you need the money? Don't look so sad."

"Everybody needs the money—the money and the encouragement all the time—worse luck!" Buchanan convincingly declared.

"How much would it cost me for a try-out?"

"Nothing—nothing whatever," came the proud assurance.

"Go ahead, then. Only don't carry off too many of my clerks—I've got attached to some of them."

Outside, Buchanan drew in a deep breath of promise-laden air, regretting the next moment that he didn't, after all, care a continental how many orders he got—orders couldn't help him. But before he knew it he was whistling the

"William Tell" overture and thinking to himself what a fortunate fellow he was. . . . Grackles were growling everywhere, a robin was singing its one pretty strain in the distance. . . . How much he liked to be able to cope with difficulties and to carry off the palm!

As he walked on, noting the sunshine and shadows and another smoke-stack beyond the bridge, it came over him (as everything did, without his having a clue to the well-spring of it) that during the last month he had gone about trading on his desperate mood; he had substituted it for the Western experiences, and his discourse on the desert, and all the other rot he had previously handed out to unwilling customers; and in consequence he had made twice as many sales as he used to average.

"Funny, amazingly"—he gloried to himself—"how I do it." His sense of the mystery of affairs permitted him to relish the success of the scheme without once pondering its cause.

When he got home that night there was another letter lying inside his door. He took it up, and—though more hesitatingly than he intended (he had half an idea of first pressing it to his lips)—he tore it into small pieces. There was a telegram under it that had set the blood throbbing in his temples. In another second he fearlessly tore the seal. "What's the matter with you, old man?" it read. "Why don't you come see us?—Haughton James."

"Dear fellow! dear, dear fellow!" Buchanan stood there, wonderingly. "I'm a cad. I'm a bad, ungrateful cur. I'm not a gentleman, even." . . . But he burned it, watching the blaze with a glittering eye.

Oh, it was a joy to live—if only to have somebody make a fuss over you! He didn't see how he could stand it if the letters should stop coming. Suddenly he determined to go down to the store and play some new records until he got sleepy.

On Sunday week, John, the janitor, woke him half an hour after noonday, to say that an aunt of his was downstairs in an automobile, waiting to see him. It was embarrassing to be caught so late abed by that decrepit member of

his family; she would tell his uncle, and word would be passed round that he was a sluggard and it was no wonder he didn't amount to anything. Pooh! though. He had done lots of business lately. Let 'em think what they wanted. Then, as he dressed, the same old cloud

"Ethel!"

"This is the car I wrote you about, that father gave me."

But he continued to shake his head blankly.

"Didn't you get any letters?" she seemed unable to repress asking.

He nodded to her.

"How could you, then, Howard? Oh, Howard!" she pleaded.

"I got them, but after—after that one—I—I stopped reading them," he answered.

Her acceptance of this was breathless. He watched her falter and then regain her poise—as inexplicably as the color came and went in her face—until she seemed suddenly aglow with determination.

She smiled at him. "He doesn't know I'm here—father doesn't know where I am," she said. "I was so sick of the river drive—no beautiful stretches of country to go through—and so lonely!"

"Why have you come? How could you do it?" he demanded, with the

pretense of domination. But it was futile.

"To get you. I wanted to see you. I need you!" she said.

His face relaxed. "Looky here, girl," he said, quizzically, "you act like you were the one who's running this show."

"I'm running it your way," she mustered courage to answer. "I'm just being the kind of woman you taught me to be."

They looked steadily at each other for a moment. . . . Then, hatless and coatless, he sprang into the motor.



AN AUNT OF HIS WAS DOWN-STAIRS, WAITING TO SEE HIM

of sorrow which had been pursuing him of late settled lower and lower over his optimism. "Life was rotten," he decided, tying his cravat. "It was all useless; nothing would matter in a hundred years."

But his heart almost stopped beating when he opened the outside door and came upon Ethel James sitting there alone in a little runabout. He had no further thoughts or feelings—except that he half started to retreat behind the closing portal.

"Oh, Howard, Howard!" she cried.

